

military-industrial complex

military-industrial complex, network of individuals and institutions involved in the production of weapons and military technologies. The military-industrial complex in a country typically attempts to marshal political support for continued or increased military spending by the national government.

The term *military-industrial complex* was first used by U.S. Pres. Dwight D. Eisenhower in his Farewell Address on January 17, 1961. Eisenhower warned that the United States must “guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence...by the military-industrial complex,” which included members of Congress from districts dependent on military industries, the Department of Defense (along with the military services), and privately owned military contractors—e.g., Boeing, Lockheed Martin, and Northrop Grumman. Eisenhower believed that the military-industrial complex tended to promote policies that might not be in the country’s best interest (such as participation in the nuclear arms race), and he feared that its growing influence, if left unchecked, could undermine American democracy.



Dwight D. Eisenhower: Farewell Address

U.S. Pres. Dwight D. Eisenhower at his Farewell Address, January 17, 1961.

The Granger Collection, New York

Although Eisenhower is credited with the phrase and many scholars regarded the phenomenon as new, elements of the domestic and international military-industrial complex predate his landmark address. Military forces have been funded overwhelmingly by national governments, which historically have been the target of lobbying efforts by bureaucrats in military-related ministries, by legislators from districts containing military bases or major military manufacturing plants, and by representatives of

private firms involved in the production of weapons and munitions. Because the goals and interests of these various actors broadly coincide, they tend to support each other’s activities and to form mutually beneficial relationships—what some critics have called an “iron triangle” between government officials, legislators, and military-industrial firms. For example, legislators who receive campaign contributions from military firms may vote to award funding to projects in which the firms are involved, and military firms may hire former defense-ministry officials as lobbyists.

Some features of the military-industrial complex vary depending on whether a country's economy is more or less market-oriented. In the United States, for example, weapons production shifted from publicly owned companies to private firms during the first half of the 20th century. In France, however, the national government continues to own and manage most military-related enterprises. Although in most cases the military-industrial complex operates within a single country, in some cases, such as that of the European Union, it is international in scope, producing weapons systems that involve the military firms of several different countries.

Despite such differences, the military-industrial complex in most economically advanced countries tends to have several characteristic features: a high-tech industrial sector that operates according to its own legal, organizational, and financial rules; skilled personnel who move between administration and production; and centrally planned controls on the quantity and quality of output. Because of the technological complexity of modern weapons and the preference in most countries for domestic suppliers, there is little competition in most military markets. The military services must ensure that their suppliers remain financially viable (in the United States and the United Kingdom this has entailed guaranteeing the profits of private firms), and suppliers attempt to ensure that public spending for their products does not decline. Because of the lack of competition and because the budgeting process is often highly politicized, the weapons systems purchased by national governments are sometimes inordinately expensive and of questionable value to the country's security. In addition, the pressure for large military budgets exerted by the military-industrial complex can result in the depletion of the country's nonmilitary industrial base, because, for example, skilled workers are attracted to high-paying employment with military firms.

The term *military-industrial complex* can also refer to the physical location of military production. Military spending creates spatial concentrations of prime contractors, subcontractors, consultants, universities, skilled workers, and government installations, all of which are devoted to research and development on, or the manufacture of, military systems and technologies. Examples include the aerospace complex in southern California, the shipbuilding complex on the southern coast of South Korea, and the isolated military research complex of Akademgorodok in Siberia. National governments often created such complexes in locations without a history of industrial production by underwriting massive migrations of skilled labour, and the areas came to resemble company towns that provided not only jobs but also housing, health care, and schools to workers and their families. The need to preserve this infrastructure can contribute to political pressure to maintain or

increase military spending. Indeed, sometimes governments have chosen to continue funding weapons systems that branches of the military have deemed obsolete, in order to preserve the communities that are economically dependent on their production—e.g., the B-2 bomber and the Seawolf submarine in the United States.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in 1991 reduced, at least momentarily, the influence of the military-industrial complex in many countries, particularly the United States and Russia. However, in part because of rising military involvement in the Middle East and concerns about terrorism, it remains a potent political force in both the United States and Russia, as well as throughout the world.

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